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# **Party elite *discursive repertoires* of globalisation, Europeanisation and immigration in France : party system dynamics and the political manufacturing of inexorability and exogenous constraints**

Workshop on ‘Mapping Elite Attitudes to Globalisation, European Integration and Regionalisation’

ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Nicosia 2006

Gilles Ivaldi \*

**FIRST DRAFT – Comments welcome**

## **Introduction**

Besides showing a rising tide of Euroscepticism in France’s traditionally pro-EU public opinion, the decisive rejection of the European Constitutional Treaty by a significant majority of voters in the May 2005 referendum bore testimony to the profound transformation undergone by the French party system over the past twenty years, as a not so distant echo to the dramatic expression of public discontent and dissatisfaction which had led to the political earthquake of 21 April 2002. While still a ‘sleeping giant’ (we borrow the expression from Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004) embedded in some of the socio-economic issues that presided over the 2002 presidential contest (Belot & Cautrès 2004), European integration came to the forefront of party competition in the 2005 referendum, again in relation to salient issues of first-order electoral politics such as unemployment or the protection of France’s most cherished public services, but also as part of a broader set of representations encompassing a wider range of international issues, most notably economic globalisation and immigration.

The purpose of this paper is to explore and discuss French party elites’ attitudes to European integration and to contrast them with partisan discursive constructions of economic globalisation, on the one hand, and immigration, on the other, in the specific context of the post-ECT referendum. We look at how these ‘active’ sets of subjective images – as resources *in* struggle (Dean, 2003)– interact with the domestic political agenda and the electoral dynamics of first-order politics. In this, we follow and expand the recent call by Peter Mair with regard to the study of political parties and elites’ attitudes towards Europe. According to Mair: “in addition to the imputed location of a party’s core identity, and in addition to the evidence provided by the formal policies which it adopts or is obliged to adopt, we need to know more about how Europe actually plays in national political discourse, as well as about the way in which it is conceived” (Mair, 2006).

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A project still in its embryonic stage, the main focus here is on the heuristic approach that can be used in the exploratory study of partisan attitudes, with a clear view to assessing its pertinence prior to a more systematic textual corpus analysis <sup>1</sup>, and to confront it with comparable attempts at mapping attitudinal preferences at party level in Western Europe and elsewhere (hence the participation in the ECPR workshop). An extension of Mair's argument on Europe to globalisation and immigration, and an attempt to combine party system approach with the social constructivist perspective underpinning critical discourse analysis (Fairclough & Thomas, 2004), this paper builds upon the concept of *discursive repertoires* – defined as articulated ideational formations produced and deployed interactively through the combination of discourses available to social actors operating in a given field (Bourdieu, 1977; Campbell, 2002; Korteweg, 2003)– to which partisan elites can have recourse under specific party system constraints and/or windows of opportunity for the purpose of mass mobilisation. From this party system perspective, the study of party-based attitudes to immigration, economic globalisation and Europe shall therefore look at the extant sets of discursive accounts upon which political actors may draw to maximise their appeal to voters in the first order arena, within the boundaries set by the necessity to achieve a politically acceptable level of ideological consistency and policy-homogeneity to avoid dissonance with their core value system and that of their traditional electoral constituency.

## Levels of analysis

The first section of the paper concentrates on various processes of productive discursive activity and semiotic practices, with a focus on the co-ordinative and communicative functions of discourse in the electoral arena. We try to examine how specific contextual event configurations trigger the formulation of adaptative strategies by political leaders, the process of discourse-policy disconnect, role-play and the tactical fragmentation of party discourse, re-contextualisation, as well as the processes of responsibility displacement, ideological re-appropriation (isomorphism) and de-ideologisation. One particularly interesting aspect of looking at images of immigration, globalisation and European integration built by partisan elites in support of the various narratives developed in the area of electoral competition is how such issues have been progressively incorporated into domestic politics through the political fabrication of exogenous constraints and inevitable processes which pose a threat to France's historical model of social prosperity, cultural identity and national sovereignty. In doing so, we seek to provide elements for a possible characterisation of globalisation, immigration and European issues in terms of their status and function within contemporary French public debate.

Second, the paper suggests a number of hypotheses with regards to some of the most significant elements of permanence and change in party system dynamics and structures of political opportunities –in a broad sense– which help account for the above construction and use of discursive repertoires of globalisation, immigration and European integration by French partisan elites. In particular, the analysis points to the centrality of 'unemployment'

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<sup>1</sup> Textual sources will include all parliamentary debates in the Senate and National Assembly, party manifestos on the European Constitutional Treaty and all party documents about European issues, economic globalisation and immigration in general, landmark and key speeches by political leaders as well as party congress voting statistics wherever relevant to the analysis. Although focused mainly on national party elites –either represented in French Parliament or not– the project will also present some data on interest groups (business, trade unions), public opinion and the many social movements and organisations that took part in the nationwide debate over the ECT referendum in 2005. Another interesting avenue for the analysis of political discourse in France is that of all leaders' personal blogs on the internet.

issues in public debate and the limits imposed by general perceptions of the lack of responsiveness by governmental elites. The emphasis is on the dramatic impact of the emergence and institutionalisation of populist anti-system and protest actors on both the left and right margins of mainstream politics, and the consequent development of unrealistic social demands and expectations in French public opinion, which continue to frame the space for political competition and contribute to artificially expand the realms of possibility thereby undermining mainstream transformative efforts to address effectively some of the most salient socio-economic issues.

### **1. Discourse in action: manufacturing political representations of globalisation, immigration and European integration**

In Michel Foucault's terms, "discursive practices are characterised by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories. Thus each discursive practice implies a play of prescriptions that designate exclusions and choices" (Foucault, 1977, p.199). In French political debate, complex phenomena such as globalisation, immigration and European integration are linguistically represented by party elites often in an over-simplified version of *inevitable* and *exogenous* processes implying particular sets of constraints that would have a direct impact on France's traditional model of welfare, cultural identity and national sovereignty. Through the magnifying lenses of this inward-looking and self-protective approach, the 'play of prescriptions' remains fairly limited in scope, particularly with regard to immigration and globalisation.

#### Globalisation, immigration: threats to French social prosperity

Economic globalisation has been traditionally conceived as a threat to the French post-war model of social welfare rather than a chance (Berger, 2000; Hanley, 2001; Meunier, 2003), with the notable exception of the business organisation (MEDEF, formerly CNPF) and the outspoken neo-liberal minority groups of the parliamentary right. Despite France's established competitiveness and successful adaptation to the requirements and exigencies of the new world economy (Meunier & Gordon, 2001), globalisation can be specified as a *negative-valence issue* in the context of the national public debate on economics, societal pessimism and growing electoral demand for social protection arising from the public (mis)perception of France's vulnerability *vis-à-vis* global business. The strong negative connotation of economic globalisation and internationalisation of capital markets –as inexorable and destructive forces behind the interests of multinational corporations–, whose effects must be curbed through regulated capitalism, continues to reduce the range of possible competing interpretative discourses. The narrative 'score' made available to partisan elites all across the political spectrum remains very limited in scope if not simply a *recitativo obligato* of economic protectionism and social protection. The construction of a negative perception of globalisation was particularly evident from the deployment of elites' narrative stories of the world economy during and immediately after the ECT-referendum campaign, as illustrated for instance by the UMP calls for preferential access agreements at EU level or the strong anti-globalisation stance accommodated by the PS in the final synthesis of the party congress held in Le Mans in November 2005, which echoed some of the most resolute anti-liberal rhetoric of the naysayers.

Nous combattons la logique libérale actuelle de la mondialisation et son cortège de dérégulations, déréglementations, libéralisations, privatisations, précarisation (...) Toute notre démarche consiste à maîtriser, réguler, encadrer le marché pour faire valoir l'intérêt général (...) L'enjeu c'est donc de prendre les mesures concrètes et utiles pour combattre la marchandisation. C'est d'apporter, par la fiscalité, le droit social et les services publics, protection et correction (*Réussir à gauche*, Parti socialiste, 18.11.2005).

Cette ambition, ce doit être de maîtriser la mondialisation, d'aider les pays européens à en tirer tous les avantages qu'elle procure, mais sans livrer les peuples aux dérives qu'elle recèle. L'Europe doit à la fois accompagner la mondialisation, la maîtriser et en protéger (Nicolas Sarkozy, *Convention pour un projet populaire*, 24.09.2005).

The strict boundaries that continue to exist around the discursive productions of economic globalisation by mainstream party leaders in France, particularly on the right of the political axis, are well in evidence when contrasted with the clear pro-market and liberal orientation in the *Réformateurs* minority faction led by MP Hervé Novelli and former PR leader and Senator Gérard Longuet within the UMP, or Ernest-Antoine Seillière, former President of the French MEDEF and now President of the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE).

La mondialisation : personne ne dit, aujourd'hui, que c'est une chance extraordinaire pour tous les pays, pour des dizaines de millions de personnes qui sortent du sous-développement grâce à cette mondialisation. (...) Pour moi, le premier patriote économique, c'est celui qui donne les meilleures conditions de développement aux entreprises en matière de fiscalité, en matière de réglementation. Aujourd'hui, en France, on est loin du compte. La mondialisation, c'est la capacité à se projeter vers l'extérieur, non pas à se protéger. (Hervé Novelli, UMP, *RTL*, 09.03.2006)

We call on you to resist any kind of "protectionism" that discourages cross-border coming together of companies. This is a real danger but I guess it will not prevent the many takeovers, acquisitions and alliances that companies will launch in Europe, because of the strategic needs of competition and globalisation. We call on the European Commission to watch out and ensure that EU Treaties are respected. The Commission must also take strong action against those Member States that infringe existing Internal Market Directives (Ernest-Antoine Seillière, President of UNICE, European Council, 23 March 2006).

A key element in the discursive formation of globalisation as a threat, the recurrent process of adequation between globalisation of the economy and the issue of job relocations outside of France is, as shall be suggested, intrinsically related to the centrality of 'unemployment' as one of the most salient issues topping the political agenda. With regard to processes, one central element inherent in the role taking by partisan actors and the 'political spectacle' –i.e. the creation and circulation of symbols in the political process (Huysmans, 2000, p.762)– of globalisation is that of specific contextual event configurations that trigger the formulation of discursive strategies. In particular, the focus should be on the social construction of company job relocations, hostile take-over bids from foreign investors (e.g. ARCELOR-Mittal Steel in January 2006 or Gaz de France / Suez in February), the closing down of production units in France (Hewlett Packard in September 2005, SEB in January 2006) or the total or partial privatisation of State-owned companies (SNCF and EDF in October 2005; 'preventive' strikes by the SNCF in November) by the media, trade unions, politicians and other actors from within the civil society, and the systematic causal link established between such crystallising events and what is publicised as the iron law of global economy and the yoke of shareholders capitalism.

Similar conclusions apply to the way in which immigration has prominently featured on France's political agenda over the past two decades and the significant shift towards centripetal convergence by mainstream party elites towards common negative understandings of immigration as a menace, in line with the broad development of a 'Fortress Europe'

approach at EU level. In October 2005, the tragic events and subsequent problematisation of illegal immigration in the Spanish city enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on the Moroccan coast came in line with the flow of arguments for the need to reinforce outside borders against the growing risk of massive incoming flows of immigrants.

Le monde est confronté à la montée des pressions migratoires. L'Europe est en première ligne, comme l'illustrent Ceuta et Melilla, Lampedusa ou Mayotte. Elle doit fonder sa réponse sur une vision d'ensemble qui intègre sécurité et développement, dans le respect de la dignité humaine. Le renforcement du contrôle des frontières de l'Union et la conclusion d'accords de réadmission efficaces pour assurer le retour des immigrés clandestins sont une exigence (Jacques Chirac, *Le Figaro*, 26 October 2005).

Again, the intersection between immigration issues and the many public concerns over France's employment situation and capacity to secure welfare provisions has formed a constitutive figure of mainstream political discourses on immigration as early as 1981, which has progressively acquired some of the typical elements characteristic of a consensual negative issue. By placing the emphasis on the need to move from '*immigration subie*' to '*immigration choisie*', the provisional immigration Bill proposed by Minister of Interior Nicolas Sarkozy in February 2006 provided further evidence of the almost exclusive allocation of a negative meaning to immigration in relation to broad socio-economic issues.

Solidarité, dignité, tels sont aussi les principes de notre politique envers les travailleurs étrangers. Les expulsions ont été suspendues. La place et les droits de ces travailleurs doivent être pleinement reconnus...Toutefois, compte tenu de la situation de l'emploi, la France n'est pas en état d'accueillir un nombre croissant de travailleurs étrangers» (Pierre Mauroy, July 1981).

Aujourd'hui je le dis clairement la France n'est plus, ne peut plus être, une terre d'immigration. Je l'ai déjà dit et je le réaffirme : "nous ne pouvons accueillir toute la misère du monde" (Michel Rocard, 07.01.1990).

Le système d'intégration à la française ne fonctionne plus. L'une des raisons majeures de ce dysfonctionnement, c'est l'incapacité dans laquelle la France s'est trouvée de maîtriser les flux migratoires depuis 1974 (...) emporté par le nombre grandissant d'une immigration irrégulière qui a conduit à une paupérisation de cette population, à la constitution de véritables ghettos, à la paralysie et au détournement du système (Nicolas Sarkozy, *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 05.02.2006).

### Challenges to the State, discourse-policy disconnect and the 'politics of embarrassment'

Socially constructed as exogenous threats in the cognitive dimension of partisan discourse, both immigration and economic globalisation represent obvious challenges to the traditional French model of Statism and political voluntarism, which is crucial to government-legitimation in France (Howarth, 2002). In particular, the rhetoric of globalisation is often based on the de-politicisation of socio-economic fields of activity and the passing of the nation state in the face of new economic constraints (Wodak & Weiss, 2000). A research avenue of particular interest is that of the discourse-policy disconnect that exists with regard to immigration policies, on the one hand, or the many adjustments of the political economy to meet the requirements of globalisation on the other hand. This points to the essential role of argumentation in the policy-making and the role of language in explaining policy situations and preferences in the process of mass communication, as well as the amount of incoherence, vagueness in description or passing over in silence certain areas of putting policy recommendations into action (Schmidt 2002: 225-230).

The consensual rhetorics of the need to defend the most cherished French model of *dirigiste* state-centred economy against the danger of globalisation have been increasingly at variance with actual governmental policy initiatives of both the Left and Right through tax reform, privatisation of public companies, liberalisation of trade and deregulation of labour, goods and services markets (Meunier, 2004; Cohen, 1996; Jefferys, 2003; Levy, 2001). Mainstream left and right have been to some extent marked by ambivalence in ‘non transformative’ policy narratives (Schmidt, 2001) and what could be characterised as the ‘politics of embarrassment’ in legitimising and justifying action (or the lack of it). As mentioned earlier, this has become manifest in the many attempts by all incumbent parties to deal with the highly sensitive issue of job relocations and the widening gap between their actual relatively limited volume –at an estimated yearly average of 13,500 jobs over the 1995-2001 period, with about 7,000 in emerging countries (INSEE, 2005)– and the amount of public debate taking place over each single occurrence of companies relocating outside of France. This was for instance well exemplified by the short-lived controversy initiated by trade unions in January 2006 regarding the possibility for the government to claim back public subsidies allocated to companies in the event of these choosing to re-locate jobs. This proposal was endorsed formally by PM Dominique de Villepin in order to formulate a pseudo-coherent stance in a ‘symbolic’ attempt to avoid political embarrassment and the admission of powerlessness political impotence in the vein of Lionel Jospin’s widely commented statement that ‘*L’Etat ne peut pas tout*’ in reference to the closing down of a Michelin factory in Wolber in 1999.

Another significant area of discourse-policy disconnect –and the political embarrassment by the mainstream left and right alike that may ultimately arise from it – in relation to economic globalisation is that of privatisation and the necessary restructuring of French capitalism, despite the coherence of the industrial project underpinning most of the decisions by incumbent parties to privatise part or the whole of State-owned companies for the purpose of forging sustainable strategic alliances (see for instance the analysis of Jospin’s *réalisme de gauche* and the voluntarist approach vis-à-vis globalisation by ‘reconciling an enduring *dirigiste* dimension with a growing enthusiasm for the market’ (Clift, 2002:477). Irrespective of the actual motives or possible economic rationale for privatisation, the suspicious and strong negative connotation associated with the latter notion in the political arena continues to vindicate any attempt at selling public companies as a move towards economic liberalism and the symbol of partisan elites surrendering to the rules and diktat by financial markets in the global world of finance, hence for instance the emergence recently of Villepin’s concept of ‘economic patriotism’, the commitment by the PS in November 2005 to re-nationalise EDF or the socialist presidential runner Dominique Strauss-Kahn’s idea of ‘temporary nationalisations’ (*15 Propositions*, 18.01.2006).

As shall be discussed, one key element in understanding such dynamics of ‘unspeakability’ in the area of privatisation and, more generally, economic deregulation or flexibility in the labour market, is the impact of the anti-liberal rhetoric deployed by populist anti-establishment actors and the discursive use of ‘privatisation’ as a marker of the pro-market conversion by all mainstream parties, through the recurrent process of indifferentiation of the political class as a whole and the ironing out by anti-system demagoguery of the differences that exist in fact in the political economy of the left and the right. On the right side of the political spectrum, such strong constraints imposed on the use of discursive repertoires of economic liberalism have been handled in different ways:

- 1) President Jacques Chirac's electorally successful yet politically disastrous ideological re-positioning in the 1995 presidential on the social-Gaullist theme of reducing the 'social fracture';

La France fut longtemps considérée comme un modèle de mobilité sociale. Certes, tout n'y était pas parfait. Mais elle connaissait un mouvement continu qui allait dans le bon sens. Or, la sécurité économique et la certitude du lendemain sont désormais des privilèges. La jeunesse française exprime son désarroi. Une fracture sociale se creuse dont l'ensemble de la Nation supporte la charge. La "machine France" ne fonctionne plus. Elle ne fonctionne plus pour tous les Français (Jacques Chirac, *Presidential campaign discourse*, 17 February 1995).

- 2) the recurrent claim by UMP leader Nicolas Sarkozy of a need for a more radical break away from the traditional French model of social welfare (as rhetorically opposed to the so-called Anglo-Saxon socio-economy), which was promptly called into question by Sarkozy's own tactical and conciliatory approach to popular dissent and left-wing driven rejection of Villepin's CPE (first job contract) in April 2006;

Je suis venu ce soir pour vous dire que la rupture avec nos habitudes, nos certitudes, nos conformismes, est nécessaire, qu'elle est urgente et surtout qu'elle est possible. Nous arrivons à un moment de vérité : les Français vont devoir choisir entre l'immobilisme et le mouvement (...) Notre responsabilité est immense parce que les Français sont en train de perdre espoir. Ils constatent l'échec de notre modèle social (...)Voici pourquoi j'ai proposé la rupture. Je ne veux pas être complice d'un système à bout de souffle que je veux refonder (Nicolas Sarkozy, Speech in Douai, 27 March 2006).

- 3) the alternative discursive practice of 'de-ideologisation', as a distinctive feature of the political communication by PM De Villepin since his coming into office in June 2005, whereby the political economy is described solely as a matter of 'pragmatism', if not simply common sense, with no reference to ideological principles especially where the latter are regarded as potential 'markers' of economic liberalism. As explained by the Prime Minister with regard to the passing of the Equal opportunity Bill enacting the CPE:

Aujourd'hui, nous sommes au rendez-vous de l'action contre la résignation, du pragmatisme contre l'idéologie (Dominique de Villepin, *Les Echos*, 22.02.2006).

Arguably, immigration policies in France have been more consistent with the normative and cognitive element in the general representation of immigrants as a threat. The alleged need for self-protection has become particularly salient in political discourse and translated into a marked shift towards the development of more restrictive immigration policies at both national and international levels, the reduction of flows and the consequent criminalisation of illegal immigrants (Givens & Luedtke, 2005; Guiraudon, 2003). Yet there are a number of comparable elements of discourse-policy disconnect and embarrassment in immigration politics which ought to be discussed briefly here as they contribute to highlight similar processes of manufacturing partisan discourses. One first area is that of the regularisation of illegal immigrants, which since the measures taken in September 1982 by Pierre Mauroy's government, has occupied the realm of public debate on immigration and proved a highly divisive issue. Echoing preceding considerations on political embarrassment, the global framing of immigration politics in France since the mid-1980s has left very little space for such mass measures, as was illustrated for instance by Ministry of Interior Jean-Pierre Chevènement's waves of regularisations under the Plural Left government from June 1997 to January 1999, whose political justification was marked at best by discretion if not by silence.



The shift towards more draconian immigration policies has been traditionally counterbalanced with recurrent yet often duplicitous appeals to ensuring greater opportunities for a better integration of ethnic minorities and a more resolute approach to working against discriminations in French society. Looking at recent developments, there is some evidence of the continuation of this double-talk together with a significant reshaping however of the public debate about immigration around new themes such as migrant quotas in congruence with the EU 2004 Lisbon Agenda, the re-emergence of the long disputed issue of voting rights for non-EU citizens in local elections or the opportunity to enact positive discrimination programs in education and employment. Of particular relevance to the analysis is the strategic attempt by the UMP to establish its position at both ends of the integrationist / exclusionist continuum. In the wake of the 2002 presidential ballot, the tactical move by the UMP towards a harder stance on immigration and law-and-order was clearly considered a vehicle for winning back those right-wing voters who had defected to the FN in previous elections. This was accompanied with a process of ideological appropriation and isomorphism as revealed in the instrumental deployment by Sarkozy of various themes which were in part borrowed directly from the counter left-libertarian corpus, notably the right for non-EU citizens to vote in municipal elections.

More importantly, the development of immigration narratives by mainstream actors shows similar features to those outlined in the case of globalisation. Consistent with the hypothesis of embarrassment is the absence of a clear stance by the socialist party on the new provisional Bill on immigration which contrasts for instance with the unambiguous support lent by the PS to the anti-CPE protest front in February / March 2006. Second, dominant parties are increasingly relying upon fragmentation in legitimate party discourse, role play in dealing with sensitive issues and Cardinal de Retz's axiom once quoted by President Mitterrand that 'one only avoids ambiguity at one's cost'. With regard for example to immigration quotas, there are a variety of positions within the PS national leadership, which ambivalently cover the entire range of pros –albeit critical– (Boutih, Lang, Aubry, Bockel) and contras (Rebsamen, Leroux, Mélenchon, Peillon) thereby contributing to increasing the vagueness and overall inaudibility of the party's official unitary position. Similarly, the elite positioning on the November 2005 riots in sub-urban France showed the role played by a number of UMP cameo role MPs in publicising the most radical discourse on immigration, polygamy or the implacability of ethno-cultural differences –as opposed to the dominant discourse on social deprivation and isolation– as an explanation for the upsurge of violence in French suburbs. Such tactics of de-multiplying channels of political communication have since been developed into a regular practice by the Sarkozist camp within the UMP, as recently evidenced for instance by the contribution by the so-called 'lieutenants' in undermining the PM position and delivering a final blow to the CPE in its initial design.

## European integration: from alternative utopia to performance assessment

Historically, in France, dominant parties have been closely associated with the European integration process, which from the start has been regarded essentially as an ‘elite-driven’ project with little public legitimacy if not support. Over the years, governmental actors of both the left and the right have completed their long process of ‘Euro-normalisation’ through the split with their national sovereignty and Eurosceptic factions (Rey, 2004; Boy et al, 2003; Haegel, 2002; Bergounioux & Grunberg, 2005) (see for instance the massive support by mainstream MPs of both the left and right to the ratification of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999, Table below). This was especially true of the Gaullist camp which provided an overwhelming parliamentary majority for the ratification of all European Treaties since 1999 and an unambiguous support to the ECT through the passing by the national council of the UMP of a pro-Yes motion with 90.8 per cent of the vote in March 2005.

**Table 1. Parliamentary votes and support to European integration (1999-2005)**

<i>Votes in favour</i>	<b>1999 Ratification of Amsterdam Treaty</b>		<b>2001 Ratification of Nice Treaty</b>		<b>2005 Constitutional Revision prior to Ratification of TCE</b>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Communist*	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
Radical-Green	16	45,7	12	38,7	—	—
Socialist	213	85,2	232	91,3	90	60,4
UDF	63	90,0	5	7,4	28	90,3
RPR / UMP	113	81,9	121	87,1	329	90,9
DL and Independent	38	88,4	35	81,4	—	—
Independent**	4	80,0	2	50,0	3	25,0

\*In 2005: Communists and ‘Republicains’

\*\*In 2005: the three Independent votes in favour of the constitutional revision were by the Green MPs

One could argue that there is almost an element of *inevitability* in the public perception of European integration and the correlative narratives by partisan elites. Since the ratification of the Maastricht referendum and France’s subsequent participation in the EMU, it is true to say that European integration has been progressively accepted as an irreversible running process from which the country could hardly withdraw. In many respects, the permissive consensus over Europe has been embraced by most political parties in and outside the mainstream, including far left groupings and right-wing ‘souverainistes’ of the MPF/RPF, the extreme right Front National being the only notably ‘rejectionist’ party within contemporary French politics (Ivaldi, 2005).

The ECT-referendum campaign of 2004/05 revealed the amplitude of change in party elites’ attitudes towards Europe since Maastricht, particularly on the left side of the political spectrum with a clearly more ambivalent support by the Greens and the socialist party –the latter’s 60.4 per cent support to preliminary constitutional revision in 2005 (see Table above) echoing the vote by party members in December 2004, which gave a majority of 58.8 per cent in favour of supporting the European constitutional Treaty. Rather than European integration itself, what lied at the realm of public debate in the referendum was the increasingly perceived Europeanisation of French politics. There is an important academic debate about how to best operationalise the concept of ‘Europeanisation’ for the purpose of comparative empirical research (Buller & Gamble, 2002; Hix & Goetz, 2000; Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003). We would argue however that, as an instrumental, symbolic and normative device manoeuvred by party elites, the notion refers mainly to the process of growing interdependence of the European and national levels, on the one hand, and to how the move towards European

integration and multilevel governance has transformed –and will continue to transform– either positively or negatively some aspects of domestic politics, on the other hand. Looking more specifically at the discursive repertoires of Europeanisation by political elites, we would like to focus on two main processes, namely recontextualisation and responsibility displacement, which both point to the role by protest actors outside the mainstream in the framing of public representations of Europeanisation and the formulation of adequate / appropriate responses by mainstream politicians. The hypothesis here is that those rhetorical processes are core elements which are constitutive of three main discourse practices on Europeanisation.

Recontextualisation –defined as the dialectical process of bringing into focus movements between genres and discourses from one network of practices to another (Fairclough & Thomas, 2004)– is crucial to the understanding of how Europe has been constructed as a political issue in France –mostly by peripheral actors; it was equally central to the making of the key policy areas that structured the core of the ECT-referendum campaign on socio-economic issues rather than EU institutional reform and the extension of qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers, the move towards a more politically integrated Europe or the inclusion of the Charter of Fundamental Rights into the Constitutional Treaty (Ivaldi, 2006a). The analysis of the referendum debate shows how the intensive deployment of representations of globalisation, Europeanisation and immigration by party elites was tactically intertwined with domestic issues through the specific process of ‘wide-ranging recontextualisation’. A striking example is that of the political construction of the so-called Bolkestein draft Directive on Services as a direct threat to France’s highly regulated labour market prior to the fastening of this particular issue to the broader referendum debate by directing the affective element in the popular rejection of the directive against the Constitutional Treaty. A comparable argumentative process was evident from the public controversy over future accession by Turkey to the European Union and how the latter issue was articulated with the European constitution, mostly via the successful cunning strategy by MPF leader Philippe de Villiers. One last example of the production activity at stake during the referendum campaign was the highly controversial building of the Charter of Fundamental Rights as a menace to France’s basic principle of secularism and a challenge to women’s right to abortion.

More generally, one interesting point of contention is the consideration of the ‘strategic and disingenuous appeal’ to those issues as part of a convenient ‘exercise in responsibility-displacement’ (Hay & Rosamond, 2002) –i.e. the attempt by party elites to justify and legitimate unpalatable socio-economic reforms– and a means of building partly distortive representations of actual processes of policy making which often distance themselves from the choices and political preferences expressed by political leaders in the ideational world. Building upon the notion of Europeanisation as an ‘independent variable in the top-down sense of being an exogenous constraint imposing policy change’ (Cole, 2001), the emphasis should be placed on how French governmental elites have purposely fashioned creative and intentional understandings of the Europeanisation of French polity to account for their own lack of domestic responsiveness. Following this, the notion of ‘responsibility displacement’ ought to be expanded to include not only processes of policy-making justification under the constraints imposed by European integration but also the significant utopian element in the ideological constructs of Europe by mainstream party leaders.

Indeed, the positive prospective anticipation of the benefits of European integration and further pillarisation through France's growing interdependence with its European partners, has formed the basis of a mainstream discursive repertoire of the *social welfare utopian alternative* to discredited inadequate domestic socio-economic policies and a solution to the country's intractable problem of unemployment. This was already a component of the PS conception of Europe in 1981 and an important element in the subsequent decision to keep France inside the EMS in 1983.

Pour la France, le moyen le plus sûr de façonner un environnement conforme aux vœux que je viens d'exprimer, c'est d'abord la construction européenne (...) La vraie tâche qui attend les Européens est d'une toute autre ampleur. Il s'agit de faire face à la crise, c'est-à-dire au chômage, à la restructuration industrielle (...) Or, dans ce nouvel environnement économique, l'Europe du libre échange semble paralysée. La nouvelle division du travail, au bénéfice des sociétés multinationales, se fait sans l'Europe, et même contre elle (...) Le gouvernement cherchera à donner rapidement corps à l'espace social européen grâce à la recherche d'une harmonisation progressive des conditions de travail et des droits des travailleurs dans la Communauté (Pierre Mauroy, Discours Assemblée nationale, 8 juillet 1981).

In 1992, the concept of Europe as a way of promoting prosperity and a rampart against economic globalisation, social *laissez-faire* or open market competition was central to President Mitterrand's notion of a 'European social model' and his strong commitment to obtaining the inclusion of a social chapter into the Maastricht Treaty, which was echoed in 1997 by the Plural left government rhetoric of the construction of EU-Economic governance linked to the establishment of a '*euro-social*' through EU interventionism (Howarth, 2002).

Espoir enfin, et je voudrais y insister, de progrès social en Europe et par l'Europe. Là aussi, Maastricht est une nouvelle étape (...) En un siècle, l'Europe a inventé, notamment contre la tentation du "laissez-faire, laisser aller", un modèle social avancé : importance de la négociation collective, haut niveau de protection. Ce modèle doit être garanti. Né dans une période de plein emploi, il doit être aussi enrichi. Protection des salariés et insertion des exclus : en un mot cohésion sociale du tissu européen (...) L'Europe c'est le moyen que nous nous donnons pour maîtriser notre avenir dans le monde. Le maîtriser et non pas le subir, comme l'envisagent d'autres, qui s'en remettent trop souvent seules forces du marché (...) L'Union économique et monétaire, c'est l'espoir d'une plus grande croissance. Jacques Delors l'a dit : elle nous permettra de créer plus d'emplois (Pierre Bérégovoy, Discours Assemblée nationale, 5 mai 1992).

Dans un délai très court, nous avons pu obtenir de tous nos partenaires, d'une part, l'acceptation d'une résolution sur la croissance et l'emploi venant compléter et équilibrer le pacte de stabilité et, d'autre part, la tenue d'un sommet exceptionnel consacré à l'emploi (...) La politique que j'entends conduire en matière européenne, dans le cadre des compétences qui sont les miennes, ira dans le sens d'un renforcement de l'Union, à condition que celle-ci soit d'abord au service des peuples qui la composent. Nous irons vers une Europe plus sociale, garante de progrès, de paix et d'indépendance (Lionel Jospin, Discours Assemblée nationale, 19 juin 1997).

Despite growing public dissatisfaction with Europe, the mainstream positive utopian repertoire continues to form part of the process of politically legitimating European integration: see for instance President Chirac's tribune of October 2005:

Nos pays sont confrontés à de grands défis économiques et sociaux (...) Entre l'illusion du repli sur soi et l'ivresse de l'ouverture à tous les vents de la mondialisation, l'Europe, unie et rassemblée, constitue le cadre d'action irremplaçable pour les relever. Elle nous donne la masse critique face aux géants du monde (...) Face aux conséquences sociales de la mondialisation, notre réponse doit être plus résolue. Quand certaines grandes entreprises conçoivent leur stratégie à l'échelle mondiale sous la seule contrainte de la rentabilité financière à court terme et prennent des décisions, par exemple de délocalisation, qui affectent l'emploi dans l'ensemble de l'Union, nous sommes plus forts en réagissant ensemble (Jacques Chirac, 'Force et Solidarité : répondre aux attentes des Européens', *Le Figaro*, 20 October 2005).

Concurrent with this positive set of representations, a second discursive repertoire of Europe is that of the EU as an iron collar as opposed to a driving force or a locus for international co-operation and economic growth where France's national interests would best flourish. Along this scapegoating line, the elite discourse on Europe is one of recurrent criticism of what is described as a 'dysfunctional' remote bureaucratic system of constraints embodied for instance in the EMU, the Stability & Growth Pact (SGP) budgetary discipline or the Brussels Commission's directives. It is true to say that in France Europeanisation has been used as a means of justifying unpopular structural changes and reforms, particularly in the highly sensitive areas of welfare policies, public spending and budgetary austerity (Moreno & Palier, 2004; Kallestrup, 2002). There is a clear evidence for instance of President Chirac's ambivalent discourse on the economic constraints imposed upon France by the SGP, and the call by traditional Gaullists within the UMP parliamentary party for a more flexible interpretation of the Maastricht criteria in opposition to budgetary orthodoxy as embodied by Economy and Finance Minister Thierry Breton. Such criticism is similarly implicitly contained in the socialist idea that the SGP should be transformed into a 'growth and employment' pact at EU level. In the French context, however, the building of this representation of Europe as an iron collar can be attributed for the largest part to the wide range of peripheral protest actors on both extremes of the political spectrum, which all embarked on the Eurosceptic crusade in the early 1990s. Their consistent denigration has made the most significant contribution to the negative construction of Europe and has fuelled public discontent. Mainstream parties may in return have been less 'proactive' in the discursive production of this remote system of bureaucratic constraints and have continued to place themselves on the level of national political voluntarism while 'benefiting' indirectly from the general public perception of their being bound hand and foot by their European commitments.

Lastly, the 2005 ECT-referendum campaign was mostly structured around a third repertoire consisting of a negative retrospective performance assessment of the model of socio-economic multilevel governance and the alleged EU's inability to secure and deliver the so long promised public goods, whereby Europeanisation was re-interpreted along the lines of the dominant socio-economic left / right cleavage of French politics. Within that specific 'top-down' system of signification, Europe was epitomised as a non-responsive external agent of global market capitalism as opposed to the ideal of a political space for workers' protection and social cohesion, which formed the core element in the utopian repertoire of Europe. This shift was due to increasingly interwoven attitudes to Europeanisation and economic globalisation, on the one hand, and the growing pressure exerted by public opinion and national demands over macro-economic and social issues – such as unemployment, the risk of social dumping, job relocation, social welfare public services or the unfair competition with the new member States –, in line with widespread pessimism in French society and public concerns with the prolonged economic recession, on the other hand.

Whilst this third repertoire emerged predominantly at the margins of the party system –as yet another manifestation of the increasing impact of populist protest actors and anti-globalisation social movements on party competition–, the novelty of the ECT referendum campaign was that it was endorsed and provided with political legitimacy by a number of mainstream leaders and civil society representatives in their pursuit of political interests and strategies within the first-order arena of French politics. This was true for instance of former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius's attempt to establish himself as a key leader of the left-wing No campaign in overt opposition to the official stance taken by the PS fellow members of pro-Yes Rasmussen's Party of European Socialists (PES); this was equally true of subsequent

strategies deployed by socialist leaders of the Yes who were forced to place themselves within this general conceptual framework of ‘negative’ assessment, as illustrated by Dominique Strauss-Kahn’s joint comment with leaders of the European Left in January 2006:

Première critique : l'Europe est inefficace. Les citoyens ont le sentiment que l'Europe a échoué sur son domaine de compétences - l'économie. Ils ont raison (...) Tant que l'Europe existante sera défaillante, les citoyens refuseront de poursuivre la construction européenne (...) Deuxième critique : l'Europe est insuffisamment protectrice. Les citoyens sont demandeurs de protections européennes. Parce que cela correspond à leurs valeurs communes. Et parce qu'ils ont besoin des soutiens nécessaires pour réussir dans un monde globalisé, plus mouvant, plus exposé. Or ils ont le sentiment que l'Europe n'est pas un rempart face à la mondialisation - pis, qu'elle en est parfois le cheval de Troie. Cette situation n'est pas soutenable. L'Europe doit répondre aux attentes des Européens. Elle seule a la masse critique pour assurer la couverture des nouveaux risques nés de la mondialisation (Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Comment la gauche peut relancer la construction européenne, *Les Echos*, 13 January 2006).

## **2. Political opportunity structures, party system dynamics and the public opinion**

This overview of party elites’ discursive repertoires of globalisation, immigration and immigration point to some similarities in the process of building political representations to which partisan elites can have recourse under specific party system constraints and/or windows of opportunity in the electoral arena. Attitudes shall be regarded not only as pre-existing cognitive filters of socio-political reality or particular sets of ideological preferences and beliefs, but also as a vehicle for strategic mass mobilisation in the first order arena of electoral politics. In France, representations of European integration for instance have long been distorted by interfering issues arising from the dynamics of party competition over the domestic agenda (Evans, 2003), as was particularly evident from the successive sets of European ballots in 1994, 1999 and 2004, which all complied with the classical second-order mid-term election model (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). To a large extent, the political debate over Europe is highly contingent to tactical manoeuvring amongst national political elites.

In this second section, we would like to suggest a number of hypotheses pertaining to some relevant elements of stability and change in the dynamics of French politics, which can help account for the above discursive constructions of globalisation, immigration or European integration amongst partisan elites. The conceptual framework here is based upon the classic notion of ‘political opportunity structure’ borrowed from the analysis of social movements (see in particular Kitschelt, 1986), although the POS concept here is apprehended in a much broader sense as ‘the features of a political system that can explain the different action repertoires’ (Van der Heijden, 2006; Meyer & Minkoff, 2004). This broadly conceptualised notion of POS can be disaggregated into the structural element –let us say some important cultural and institutional variables–, the dynamics of party competition and electoral politics, as well as the public opinion dimension and how social demands are politically engineered.

### Social identities, cultural values and political tradition

Although not the main focus of this paper, the above analysis of partisan elites repertoires points to a number of relevant structural elements in French politics. Clearly, the persistence of the old tradition of France's post-war dirigisme, political voluntarism and Colbertist State intervention in the political economy is of particular significance to the present analysis as it continues to imprint policy referentials of increasingly 'cartelised' (Katz & Mair, 1995) parties of both the mainstream left and the Gaullist right. In general cultural terms, the challenges posed to this traditional nation state-centred perspective by international and global issues such as those involved here are also clearly at the level of the country's perception of its own power and status within the international community. One could argue that France has undergone a 'Copernican revolution' over the recent years, that is a significant shift away from the mostly geocentric model –with France at its centre– and the re-evaluation of the nation's influence and role at international level, particularly within the post-2004 enlarged EU. Ironically, one key argument of the mainstream Yes camp in the ECT-referendum campaign was the painful admission of France's powerlessness and incapacity to impose a new Treaty –the so-called B plan of the No supporters– to its European partners.

Second, as a correlate of the above considerations on the role of the State, one must stress the critical contribution by national welfare policies in establishing and maintaining electoral loyalties. Access to national resources and the redistributive capacity by mainstream parties to deliver a wide range of public goods, services and welfare provisions were central elements in post-war France; welfare measures have been used over recent years to soften the impact of deregulation and market-oriented reforms, and provide social protections for those affected by liberalisation (Levy, 2000; Béland & Hansen, 2000).

Lastly, the analysis should point to the institutional logics in the existing patterns of party competition and co-operation, the strong disproportional element in the manufacturing of parliamentary majorities in legislative elections and the lack of national coalition potential by protest parties at the fringes of the political system. One important consequence of this closedness of the party system and containment of peripheral actors outside of the governmental and parliamentary arenas is the reinforcement of their uninhibited ability to mobilise political resentment and anti-elite discontent through populist anti-establishment appeal and, as shall be discussed, the demagogic framing of unrealistic social demands in the electorate. Since the mid-1980s, the impact of protest parties has been reinforced by the alternation of proportional representation with the traditional two-ballot majority system in the electoral agenda, the opening of windows of political opportunities in second-order elections and the consequent 'proportionalisation' of electoral preferences (Parodi, 1997).

### Party system dynamics and electoral competition

Looking at the dynamics of the national party system points of course to the core vs periphery line of division in party competition, which forms a key element in understanding the specific dynamics of contemporary French electoral politics. The two successive political tremors of the 2002 presidential ballot and 2005 referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty were testimonies to the salience of this cleavage, the increasing level of ideological polarisation and party fragmentation, and the growing impact of electoral consolidation and institutionalisation of anti-system parties on both ends of the political axis (Cole, 2003; Elgie, 2000; Grunberg, Mayer & Sniderman, 2002; Cautrès & Mayer, 2004; Lewis-Beck, 2004; Perrineau & Ysmal,

2003; Perrineau, 2005). European integration can be considered a *systemic issue* based upon this particular dimension. As constitutive elements in partisan discourses, we would argue that European issues are '*dormant*' in that they remain largely ignored in first-order electoral politics and erupt sporadically under specific political opportunity structures such as European referenda (Maastricht in 1992 and ECT in 2005) or the five successive sets of European elections that took place between 1979 and 2004, which all cast off the strong institutional bipolar dynamics of the majoritarian two-ballot electoral system.

With regard to the manufacturing of partisan attitudes of immigration, globalisation and European integration, the development of anti-system actors outside mainstream politics has two main implications. First, the rise of populist anti-establishment parties makes a significant contribution to the promotion of state-led measures and places a strong emphasis on state interventionism in the political economy and social welfare policy, particularly with regard to deriving the most 'appropriate' responses to the challenges of economic globalisation. The statist element is of course inherent in the ideology of national sovereignty of parties such as the MPF or FN and their comparable rhetoric of the need for the country to regain control over the political economy, but one could argue that it has also become increasingly central to the anti-globalisation discourses by the radical left together with the incorporation of the '*alter-mondialiste*' call for the regulation of capitalism at the international level: see for instance some of the key measures promoted by the LCR Trotskyites such as the requisitioning by the State of private companies in case of redundancy, the universal 100% coverage by social security benefits or the nationalisation of drug companies and re-nationalisations of all former state monopolies.

Second the process of ideological polarisation can be considered a twofold phenomenon at stake on both the 'old' and 'new' politics axes of competition. On the general libertarian-authoritarian continuum, which we regard here as characteristic of the 'new politics' line of cleavage, polarisation follows for the essential a linear pattern, with party elites being more 'evenly' distributed across the axis on issues such as immigration, law and order or national identity, despite a clear shift of the centre of gravity towards the right end of the continuum over the recent years. On the old politics axis, on the contrary, and this is particularly true of party elites' attitudes towards globalisation, the process of ideological polarisation has become increasingly non-linear U-shaped in its format. This is mostly due to the ideological conversion by populist right-wing anti-system actors to a virulent anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist stance which resembles in many respects that of the far left. The post-liberal aggiornamento of the FN dates back to the mid-1990s and has since been central to Le Pen's party re-positioning within the system in a more systematic attempt at appealing to left-wing defectors (Ivaldi, 2003). Interestingly, the building of an 'alter-nationalist' front is very likely to become a key element in the party strategy in 2007 and was recently echoed by the FN's ambivalent, to say the least, attitude towards the CPE and reluctance to support overtly the liberal logics of labour market flexibility in the new contract. Similarly, the endorsement by the MPF of anti-globalisation themes was well in evidence in the 2005 referendum campaign, together with the party's radical shift towards anti-system xenophobic populism breaking further away from mainstream inclusion and the liberal-conservative family where Villiers originated.



## The political framing of social demands and the public opinion

As suggested above, one particularly significant aspect of party attitudes towards European integration and the political construction of Europe as an exogenous system of constraints or an agent of international market capitalism is the process of periphery ideological framing of mainstream party representations. A similar conclusion applies to immigration and globalisation which were originally proprietary issues of the extreme right and extreme left respectively. Globalisation was pushed to the forefront of the national political agenda in the late 1990s by a number of protest peripheral organisations and social movements such as ATTAC or the *Confédération Paysanne* (Ancelovici, 2002; Martin, 2000; Bruneau, 2004). The *alter-mondialiste* agenda has since occupied the realm of the country's economic debate around the anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation line of opposition to the OECD Multilateral Agreement on Investment negotiation and, subsequently the WTO pro-market stance (Agrikoliansky et al, 2005; Sommer, 2003). For their part, immigration issues gained political prominence in the mid-1980s mainly as a consequence of the rise and institutionalisation of the Front national whose influence on policy preference and elite decision making became evident in the restrictiveness of immigration laws implemented by the mainstream Right (Schain, 1996; Van Der Brug & Fennema, 2003; Hansen & Koehler, 2005).

The impact of the repertoires of immigration, globalisation or European integration by peripheral protest actors is clearly discernible in the structuring of public attitudes. Public opinion data point for instance to the negative consensual perception of economic globalisation in France, with 58 per cent perceiving 'globalisation as a threat to employment and companies', that is the highest rate of negative representation far above the EU-15 average of 35 per cent (FLASH EB N°151b October 2003), a level comparable to the 52 per cent saying that they 'fear globalisation' in December 2005 (*Libération*-BVA, 12.12.2005). No less than 61 per cent of the French have a 'negative' perception of 'capitalism' (*Libération*-LH2, 4 November 2005). Looking at trends in public attitudes since the late 1990s shows a significant increase in the overall proportion of negative perceptions of globalisation (see Table below).

**Table 2. Trends in public perception of economic globalisation in France (1998-2005)**

% 'globalisation is a <i>bad thing</i> for...'	1998	2003	2005
French consumers	29	42	47
French companies	25	44	47
Someone like you	34	44	50
Country's public services	N.A.	43	51
Population's standard of living	36	50	62
French employees	46	58	64
Jobs in France	43	66	65

Sources : 1998: CSA-*Challenges*-France Inter, October 1998; 2003: CSA-*L'Humanité*, 27-28 August 2003; 2005: CSA-*Challenges*, 7-8 December 2005

The vote in the ECT-referendum revealed the popular impact of the third repertoire of Europeanisation based upon a negative performance assessment of the EU model of social governance: for 46 per cent of the voters, 'the Treaty would aggravate unemployment in France' and was 'too liberal' for another 34 per cent (TNS-SOFRES, RTL-TF1-*Le Monde*, 29 May 2005). Fifty-three percent of those interviewed by CSA expressed their 'worries' about the social impact of European integration (CSA Exit-poll survey, 29 May 2005). Looking at

the specific reasons given by the naysayers to account for their vote, the ‘negative effects of the European Constitution on the employment situation in France’, the ‘level of unemployment and weakness of the economy’ and the ‘too liberal free-market nature of the draft’ were cited as the first three motives for rejecting the Treaty (Flash Eurobarometer 171, 30/31 May 2005). Lastly, a large proportion (63 per cent) of the French continue to think that ‘there are too many immigrants in France’ (TNS-SOFRES, *Le Monde*-RTL, 7-8 December 2005). Interestingly, the combination of a hard exclusionist stance with a more inclusionist approach –which lies at the heart of the UMP strategy on immigration since 2002– is supported by a majority as revealed, among the many polls published on that particular set of issues, by the survey conducted in May 2003 by IPSOS (see table below).

**Table 3. Public attitudes towards immigration (2003)**

Exclusion	Inclusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 57% against regularising all illegal immigrants</li> <li>• 59% for immigration quotas</li> <li>• 58% in support of banning Islamic veil in schools</li> <li>• 78% for taking immigrants’ fingerprints when delivering visas</li> <li>• 73% fight against paper marriages</li> <li>• 72% for reinforcing controls over short-term stay permits</li> <li>• 56% in favour of extending periods of retention prior to deportation</li> <li>• 53% in favour of extending trial periods before granting residency permits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 61% in favour of voting rights in local elections for non-EU foreigners established in France for over 10 years</li> <li>• 49% for building mosques in French cities</li> <li>• 68% to soften the implementation of the so-called ‘double sentence’ for the expulsion of foreigners</li> </ul>

Source: IPSOS-LCI-*Le Point*, 15 March 2003

Of particular significance here is the resonance of the radical rhetorics of anti-system actors in some of the discursive repertoires deployed by dominant parties, and the consequent bestowing of political respectability and credibility upon fringe actors, be it because of manoeuvring and conciliatory attitudes, or tactical accommodation of radical ideology such as for instance the re-appropriation by the mainstream right of part of the FN’s agenda on the salient issues of immigration and law-and-order throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Ivaldi, 2006b) or the more recent attempt by socialist leaders (Fabius, Mélenchon) to establish links with the far left. More generally, parties of government are confronted with the amplificatory and distorsive effect of exaggeration and over-simplification in the dialectics of anti-system actors. These particular processes were well in evidence in the 2005 referendum on the ECT: for example, the mainstream socialists’ call for a more social Europe –which was accompanied with a number of sound proposals to protect more effectively the European social model and develop a ‘Welfare Europe’– was almost made inaudible because of the ideological escalation by left-wing leaders of the No in fustigating the process of social deregulation within the EU.

That governmental actors have become more susceptible to the sirens of political demagoguery by protest competitors is of course an indication of the increasing ‘vulnerability’ of mainstream parties (Bartolini, 2002), which emerges from the almost mechanical replication of the anti-incumbency pattern in both national and second order elections since 1981, at times in the form of landslide out of hand voting out of parties in office (e.g. the legislative elections of 1993 and 2002 or the 2004 regional contest). To some extent, the deficit of policy responsiveness and the inability by mainstream actors to deliver effectively on the ever more salient issues of unemployment and job insecurity has made it increasingly difficult for parties of government to objectify socio-economic policy choices, the record of Jospin’s term in

office being perhaps one notable exception and the recent U-turn by Villepin's government on the CPE one good example of party sensitivity to popular concerns and demands. This lack of political opportunity for transformative policy narratives is not of course totally independent from the high level of intra-party factionalism and rivalry, the tactical manoeuvring by partisan elites in first order politics and the bitter competition entailed within each political camp by the growing personalisation of electoral politics in the specific context of French presidentialism.

Notwithstanding the actual performances of parties in government, such fragility and difficulty by mainstream parties in articulating transformative policy discourses is also a clear consequence of the de-legitimising narratives of 'irresponsiveness' and the blurring of differences in policy preferences by anti-system actors on both fringes of the political spectrum through the process of 'de-differentiation' and the 'recoding of the universe of political actors as a homogeneous political class' (Schedler, 1996, p.295) (e.g. the polemical imagery of '*bande des quatre*' (FN), the 'pro-globalisation and socialist UMPS system' (MPF) or 'the devastating effects of 30 years of neo-liberal policies' (LCR)). Even more importantly, the political communication by anti-system actors, besides imposing this reductionist framework upon the perceptive assessment of policy styles and choices by dominant parties, has played a crucial role in 'stretching' further the scope for political possibility by promoting a number of unrealistic demands amongst citizens. Albeit contextually different, we would argue that this process is to some extent comparable to that of 'inconsistencies or outright contradictions among relevant beliefs held by citizens [and their] unrealistic expectations concerning the extent to which parties can achieve a series of demanding objectives' identified by Linz in his study of anti-party sentiments and attitudes towards political parties in Spain and Latin America (Linz, 2002). Rhetorics such as the 'zero immigration' or 'national preference' themes publicised by actors of the right-wing nationalist camp or the claim to obtain from all France's partners within the EU the drafting of a more protective and socially oriented European Constitutional Treaty, which was entailed in the so-called B-Plan of the naysayers in the 2005 referendum, illustrate this process of setting unachievable objectives for parties of government whilst simultaneously fuelling unrealistic expectations in the general public.

As explained by Linz, party criticism often 'reflects ambiguous, confusing, or even self-contradictory evaluations by citizens based upon (...) a lack of understanding of the complexities and cross-pressures that parties are subjected to in performing their many roles in democratic politics'. A brief overflight of recent French public opinion data on general attitudes towards key socio-economic issues shows some evidence of the coexistence within public opinion of that sort of contradictory demands and evaluations, with for instance the majority call for a reduction in public spending together with claims for an increase in social minima (SMIC, RMI) or the improvement of education in schools or universities (see Table below).

**Table 4. Public opinion and socio-economic reform in France: priority areas (December 2005)**

	Main priority	Important reform	Secondary	DK
Improve education in schools	67	27	5	1
Reduce public spending	61	25	12	2
Increase social minima (SMIC, RMI)	52	34	12	2
Improve universities	51	36	11	2
A more flexible labour market regulation	30	38	29	3
Suppress Taxes on Wealth (ISF)	16	16	64	4

Source: CSA-Challenges, 7-8 December 2005

Similarly, the problematisation by the radical left of private company lay-offs as a highly sensitive political issue provides another very good example of the progressive incorporation within the space for legitimate public debate of socio-economic proposals and policy orientations which would go far beyond the actual margins of manoeuvre in the political economy by governmental elites, and how such process of ideological ‘escalation’ might contribute *in fine* to undermine notable transformative policy efforts by mainstream parties to effectively tackle the issue of potentially abusive or unjustified redundancies. This was well exemplified by the parliamentary and public debates on Jospin’s Bill on Social Modernisation in 2001/2002 and the PS-PC dispute within the Plural Left over measures which would prevent companies that make a profit from laying workers off. This has since then become a key element in the political agenda by the extreme Left as illustrated recently by the LCR programme to forbid all lay-offs –be they individual or collective–, the obligation for companies to derive mutual resources to provide jobs and maintain productive activity in declining sectors of the economy, the legal guarantee for all employees to avail of a stable full-time job, or the outlawing of part-time contracts that are imposed upon workers (LCR *10 Emergency proposals for an anti-capitalist policy*, January 2005). At discursive level, this has been encapsulated into a broader negative perception of French capitalism embodied in the rhetorical figure of the profound incompatibility between record stock market profits by the national top forty corporations (CAC 40) and the general situation of unemployment in France, whose constitutive elements subsequently colonised some of the political narratives by the socialist party of alternative measures to the ‘neo-liberal economics’ of the UMP –see for instance Martine Aubry’s recurrent and almost mythified evocation of Jean Gandois or Antoine Riboud’s employment capitalism. This was also illustrated for instance by the PS proposal to ‘impose financial efforts upon companies which lay workers off for financial reasons under the pressure of their stockholders’ (Le Mans party congress synthesis, November 2005) in line with a 79 per cent support in public opinion for taxing lay-offs by companies that make a profit (CSA-*Challenges*, 7-8 December 2005).

## Conclusion

Consistent with an unfailing trend in French politics, the partly new line of division over Europe that arose from the spatial re-distribution of partisan elites across the Yes and No camps in May 2005 was soon absorbed into the specific dynamics of national politics and vanished into the thin air of domestic party competition with all political leaders’ minds set already on the 2007 presidential ballot. Such fleeting publicisation of European integration is in sharp contrast with the enduring articulation of economic globalisation and, even more predominantly, immigration with the most salient issues within the first-order electoral arena, which are central to public debate and co-ordinate core elements in patterns of inter-party competition and voters’ preferences (Grunberg et Schweisguth, 2003; Andersen & Evans, 2003).

At the level of party competition, one major issue of the forthcoming electoral sequence of 2007 will be of course whether or not the reshuffling of the party system that took place in the ECT-referendum issue will subsist and significantly impact on the domestic political agenda. European issues tend generally to be absorbed into the political parties’ national agenda if not simply carefully avoided by mainstream actors when the time comes to appeal to voters in first-order ballots. In 2005, however, the opposition over Europe was more closely articulated

with the classic left-right axis of electoral competition over traditional social and economic issues and should therefore be more easily transposable into the domestic arena in 2007. In more general terms of partisan discursive repertoires, a number of questions arise from the most recent developments in French politics, the transition towards the post-Chirac era and whether or not the space for 'transformative' policy narratives will significantly increase in 2007.

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